

## CHAPTER VII

### BATTLE OF CONCEPCION — CAPTURE OF SAN ANTONIO

THE news of the fight at Gonzales kindled the spirit of the Texan colonists into open flame. On the 3d of October, <sup>1835</sup> the committee of San Felipe issued an address calling upon each man in Texas to decide for himself whether he would submit to the destruction of his rights and liberties by the Central Government of Mexico. "If he will not submit, let him give his answer by the mouth of his rifle." It concluded by announcing that "the citizens of Gonzales have been attacked, the war has begun," and appealing to every citizen to march to the assistance of his fellow-countrymen now in the field. Meetings were held in all the townships, and bodies of armed men gathered together, and took their departure for the seat of war. At a meeting at San Augustine, October 5, Houston, Rusk, and other leading men were present, and a company of volunteers was raised, which left at once for the scene of action. At a general meeting of the committees of the township of Nacogdoches, Sam Houston was elected commander-in-chief of the forces in Eastern Texas, and at once engaged in organizing and forwarding the volunteers.

The leaders of the colonists gathered at San Felipe to consult with Austin. Among them was Zavala, who left his estate on the San Jacinto River to cast in his lot with the American colonists, and was welcomed as representing the liberal sentiment in Mexico, as well as for his own ability and reputation. On October 8, Austin issued a general appeal to the citizens of Texas to hurry by forced marches to Gonzales, "without waiting for cannon or anything." The gathering at San Felipe formed a temporary government by electing a council of representatives from each municipality. The council elected R. R. Royall President, and Austin left to join the forces at Gonzales. He arrived on the evening of the 10th of October, and was at once elected commander-in-chief by general consent. He sent off messengers to hasten the arrival of the volunteers. Houston received the call at San Augustine, and took out his last five-dollar bill to give to the express rider, whom he dispatched to summon the citizens. The purpose of the army was the capture of San Antonio, and Austin marched on the 13th at the head of 350 men to a point on the San Antonio River about eight miles below the town. Here he encamped, and awaited reinforcements. General Cos had reached San Antonio on the 9th with 500 men, and immediately dispatched Colonel Ugartechea to the Rio Grande for a body of additional troops.

Previous to Austin's advance a force of 110 men had been sent under the command of Captain Benja-

min Fort Smith to take possession of Victoria. In the mean time the colonists in the neighborhood of Goliad had rallied for the capture of that place, where the Mexican commandant had been exercising an oppressive tyranny. They were only forty in number, but set out on the march for the town under the command of Captain George Collingsworth. They reached the ford on the San Antonio River below the town about midnight on the 9th of October, and sent forward scouts to reconnoitre. As the main body was feeling its way toward the town it came upon a man hiding in a thicket of mesquite bushes. It was Colonel Milam, who had made his escape from Monterey, through the connivance of his jailer, and ridden day and night for six hundred miles. Utterly exhausted, he had thrown himself down to rest, when he was aroused by the voices. He at first supposed the party to be Mexicans, and was preparing to defend himself, when he discovered them to be Americans and made himself known. He joined the ranks, and the party penetrated into the town. As they reached the quarters of Lieutenant-Colonel Sandoval, the commandant, they were discovered and fired upon by the sentinel. He was killed by a shot, and the door of the house was broken in with axes. Sandoval was made prisoner, and the garrison, taken by surprise, offered no resistance. A portion of them escaped in the darkness, but twenty-five remained prisoners. Only the sentinel was killed in the affair. The spoils included supplies and muni-

tions of war to the value of \$10,000, two or three pieces of artillery, and 500 stand of arms. The capture of Goliad also broke up the communication of the Mexican troops with the Gulf, which was never afterward regained. The troops under Captain Smith found that the Mexicans had abandoned Victoria, and returned to join in the attack on Goliad, but only arrived the day after its capture.

On the 20th, the forces under Austin moved up to the Salado Creek, about four miles from San Antonio, and a flag was sent to General Cos with a demand for the surrender of the place. Cos refused to receive it, and gave warning that he would fire on a second one. Austin remained in camp at the Salado, awaiting the arrival of reinforcements and artillery, and Cos busied himself in barricading the streets and building breastworks. While the army was encamped on the Salado, Houston arrived with a contingent of troops from eastern Texas. Unlike most of his associates, who took to fighting as readily as to any other occupation, Austin was diffident and uneasy in his position as commander-in-chief. He felt his incapacity in military affairs, and his health had also suffered from his long confinement in Mexico. On Houston's arrival Austin urged him to take the command. Houston declined, saying that the volunteers, who had gathered at Gonzales, had elected Austin as commander-in-chief, and that it would cause dissatisfaction if another should take his place. Austin argued that, as Houston had already been elected to the com-

mand of the troops in eastern Texas, there would be no objection to his becoming the general-in-chief. Houston, however, persisted in his refusal, but offered to serve under Austin's orders. Houston was, doubtless, wise in refusing to take the command at the risk of causing dissatisfaction by seeming to displace Austin, but it is known that he did not approve the movement for the capture of San Antonio, and had already written to Fannin and others advising the concentration of the army behind the Guadalupe. He did not as yet appreciate the fighting capacity of the Texan volunteers as compared with the Mexican conscript soldiers, and, perhaps, did not fully realize it until he saw it under his own eyes at San Jacinto.

San Antonio was one of the oldest as well as the largest and most important of the Spanish settlements in Texas. It had been founded in 1715 as a military post in consequence of the French schemes for the occupation of Texas from the colony of Louisiana, and to afford protection to the Missions of the Franciscan friars, which were being planted in the valley of the San Antonio River. It had grown through various vicissitudes, and several captures by American filibusters and Mexican revolutionists, to a town of about 2500 inhabitants, and was the depot of a considerable trade with the Indians and the northern Mexican provinces. Its situation was a lovely one, in the valley of the head-waters of the San Pedro Creek and the San Antonio River, whose limpid, green

waters wound their way through the town under a sheltering fringe of luxuriant foliage. Around it was a gently rolling prairie, whose elevations bounded the horizon. Noble groves of lofty pecan-trees filled the river bottoms and shaded the gushing springs. To the south, for a distance of ten miles, extended the stations of the stone churches and buildings of the Missions, each with its surrounding wall for a protection against the Indians. The buildings were elaborate and strongly built, and some of the churches were decorated with fine and costly carvings, but at this time they were abandoned and falling to ruin. The colonies of Indian proselytes had disappeared under the attacks of the savage Comanches and Apaches, and the friars had withdrawn to Mexico. The great irrigation ditches, which had been dug to fertilize the broad valley, were filled up and choked, and the rich fields, which had flowered with tall maize, were overgrown with rank grass and mesquite bushes. The town was mostly on the west bank of the river, extending into a deep indentation toward the east. It was grouped around two large squares, the Main and Military Plazas, which were separated by the church of San Fernando. The houses and main buildings were of stone, many of them strong and substantial, with thick walls and embrasured windows. But scattered among them, and extending into the suburbs, were the jacals or huts of the poorer Mexicans, constructed of adobe, the sun-dried brick, or simply of wattles and mud. The inhabitants were almost alto-

gether Mexicans, with a few American traders, and, although the town had considerably decayed since the early part of the century, there were a number of wealthy families, and a society which preserved the traditions of Spanish luxury and hospitality. The Indians professed a nominal friendship for the people, and frequented the place for trade. But they conducted themselves with a barbaric insolence and sense of mastery. They invaded the houses and helped themselves to articles without resistance, and a Mexican soldier would often be seen humbly holding the horse of a Comanche brave. On the east side of the river, about three fourths of a mile from the plaza, was the Mission of San Antonio de Valero, or the Alamo, with its church, convent, and walled inclosure.

On the 27th of October, Austin sent a party of ninety men, under the command of Colonel James Bowie and Colonel James W. Fannin, to reconnoitre and select a position for the army nearer San Antonio, with instructions to return before night. This, however, they did not do, but encamped near the Mission Concepcion, about a mile and a half below the town, in a bend of the river, about a hundred yards wide, called the "Horseshoe." It was a strong position, the river and a skirt of timber protecting the rear, while in front the bottom sunk below the level of the prairie to the depth of from six to ten feet in the form of a semicircle open to the front, the steep bluff forming a protection to those behind

it. The Mexicans discovered the camp, and made preparations to surround it during the night, crossing the river at a ford about two hundred yards above it. Colonel Bowie was alarmed by the creak of an artillery wheel, and aroused the men, who lined the parapet on both sides of the semicircle, and waited for daylight. The advance of the Mexicans came upon Henry Karnes, an outpost sentinel, in the darkness. He fired upon them and fell back into the camp. The dawn was darkened by a heavy mist, and the Mexicans commenced the attack by harmless volleys in the obscurity. As soon as it was light the Texan troops were drawn together on the south side of the angle, so as to avoid the danger of a cross-fire, and occupied themselves in clearing a path through the vines and underbrush, so as to readily rally upon an attacked point, and in cutting steps in the bluff, so as to fire over its edge. Before this work was completed the Mexicans advanced with trailed arms and formed a line about two hundred yards from the bluff on the right flank of the Texans. Five companies of cavalry surrounded the whole front of the Texan position. The engagement opened with the deadly crack of a rifle from the extreme right of the Texan line. The fire of the Mexican infantry was in heavy and continuous volleys, which did no execution, while the Texans fired with single shots and an accurate aim, each man yielding his place to another at the parapet while he dropped back to reload. About ten minutes after the beginning of the engagement

the Mexicans brought up a four-pounder cannon, which opened a harmless fire on the Texan right flank, and the trumpets sounded for a cavalry charge. The charge was broken by a volley from the Texan rifles, which emptied the foremost saddles, and the artillerymen were leveled around the gun. Twice the cavalry was re-formed under blows from the flats of the officers' swords, only to break under the Texan fire as it charged; and three times the gun was cleared, the last man falling in a vain attempt to spike it. It was fired only five times, and was left in the hands of the victors. During the engagement the mules attached to the caisson were wounded, and tore through the line of the infantry, throwing them into confusion. After the third attempt to charge, the Mexican troops were re-formed on the prairie out of the reach of fire, and withdrew to San Antonio. The number of the Mexican troops was estimated at 400. Their loss was sixty-seven killed and forty wounded, the proportion showing the deadly accuracy of the Texan fire. Sixteen men were found dead around the cannon. The Texans had but one man, Richard Andrews, killed, and none wounded. A messenger had been sent to Austin, and he hurried up with the main army, but did not arrive until about half an hour after the fight was over.

After the battle of Concepcion Austin moved his troops, who had now increased to about one thousand men, to a position north of San Antonio, and settled down into a sort of blockade of the town. At a

council of war it was decided that it would be impossible to capture the place without siege guns to batter down the walls and barricades. Houston and other delegates to the Convention left the camp for San Felipe in order to organize the civil government. Cos continued to fortify himself, and dispatched a messenger to Laredo to hasten the reinforcements. On November 25, Austin, who had been elected by the Convention as one of the commissioners to solicit aid in the United States, resigned as commander-in-chief, and left the army. General Edward Burleson, who had won distinction as an Indian fighter, was elected in his place.

Various skirmishes took place between the Texan and Mexican forces, one of which was celebrated as the "Grass Fight." One of the principal scouts in the Texan army was Erasmus, or "Deaf" Smith, as he was called from his infirmity. Smith was a native of New York, where he was born in 1787, and had been one of the early adventurers in Texas. He had taken part in Long's filibuster expedition in 1819, and married a Mexican woman of San Antonio. He was a notable type of the wandering hunter and frontiersman, thoroughly at home in the wilderness, with a passion for solitude and the loneliness of the prairie and forest. He was celebrated among all his fellows for his skill in woodcraft, his coolness and daring, and was the most efficient scout of the army during all its campaigns. He was of medium size, with black hair and eyes, and a dark and leathery

countenance. On November 26, Smith had been out on a scout, and discovered a body of about one hundred cavalymen, who had been sent out by Cos to cut grass for his starving horses. Smith supposed them to be the reinforcements under Ugartechea, who was reported to be on his way from Laredo, and that the panniers of the mules were loaded with silver to pay off the Mexican troops. He galloped into the camp, and gave the alarm. The men instantly swarmed out at the cry of "Ugartechea," and Bowie dashed off at the head of one hundred mounted men to intercept the convoy. He came upon the Mexican cavalry about a mile from the town, and they took refuge in the dry bed of a creek. Bowie's movements had been seen from San Antonio, and a party of the garrison sallied out to the relief of the foragers, bringing with them two pieces of artillery. They attacked Bowie as he was about to charge upon the cavalry in the ravine, and he wheeled to meet them. There was a brisk fight for some minutes, the Mexicans falling back. In the mean time the main body of the Texan army arrived on the ground, drove the foragers out of the ditch, and followed the retreating Mexicans to the town. The mules, with their panniers of grass, were captured. The Mexicans had about fifty killed and some wounded. The Texans had one killed and one missing.

Meanwhile, the Texan troops, as is usual with all volunteer soldiery, had become impatient and dissatisfied with the long and apparently fruitless service,

and were continually drifting away from the camp. There was no regular term of enlistment and no rigid rule of discipline. Every one came and went as he pleased. The army had gathered under a sudden impulse, and in the disappointment at the failure to immediately attack San Antonio many went home. Two companies of fifty men each arrived from the United States. They had been recruited in New Orleans, fitted out by subscriptions of the citizens, and were called the "Grays." A company of volunteers also arrived from Mississippi, and another from eastern Texas. But, in spite of these additions, Burleson's army, on the 1st of December, did not amount to over eight hundred men. There was great dissatisfaction among the volunteers at the prospect of continued inaction. One Dr. James Grant, a Scotchman, who had large estates in Coahuila, and had been driven out by the troops of Santa Anna, was active in endeavoring to induce a movement upon Matamoras, asserting that it would be supported by an expedition from the United States, and a revolutionary movement in Mexico.

On December 3, three Americans, Messrs. Smith, Holmes, and Maverick, who had been detained as prisoners in San Antonio by General Cos, made their escape and came into the Texan camp. They gave such an account of the condition of the garrison and the defenses that it was decided to attack the town at daybreak the next morning. During the night one of the Texan scouts disappeared, and it was appre-

hended that he had deserted to the enemy with information of the intended attack. A council was hastily called in Burleson's tent, and it was decided to give up the venture and raise the siege. When this decision became known to the troops there was almost a mutiny, and every indication that the army would disperse and fall to pieces. At this juncture the suspected scout returned, bringing with him a Mexican lieutenant who had deserted. The deserter confirmed the accounts of the discouragement among the garrison and the weakness of the defenses. Colonel Milam urged Burleson to authorize an attack, and received permission to call for volunteers. Stepping out in front of Burleson's tent, he waved his hat, and shouted to the angry and disorganized men, "Who will go with old Ben Milam into San Antonio?" An eager crowd took up the cry, and gathered about him. Milam was elected the commander by acclamation, and the men were directed to meet at night at the old mill on the banks of the river between the camp and the town.

At the meeting of the volunteers, 301 in number, at the mill, the plan of attack was arranged. The force was divided into two battalions, the first under the command of Colonel Milam, and the second under that of Colonel Frank W. Johnson, who had been prominent in the disturbance on the coast, and was on Santa Anna's proscribed list. The force moved to the attack just before dawn, and penetrated into the town, the division of Milam

entering by Acequia street, and that of Johnson by Soledad street. These streets led directly to the plaza, and at the upper ends were defended by barricades and swept by artillery. As they moved along in the darkness between the low walls of the houses, a sentinel gave the alarm, and was shot by Deaf Smith, who was leading Johnson's force as a guide. The drums beat the alarm in the garrison, and the divisions rushed forward and broke into two houses for shelter. Milam's division took possession of the house of De La Garcia, and Johnson's that of the Vice-Governor, Veramendi. These houses were opposite to each other on the two streets, and about a hundred yards from the plaza. In the mean time Colonel Neill, who had been dispatched from Burleson's camp to make a feint on the Alamo, opened fire, withdrawing after the engagement became general in the town. The Mexicans, as usual, fired furiously and wildly with cannon and small arms. The Texans waited for daylight, and then through the windows and the loop-holes, which they had made in the walls of the houses, picked off the cannoneers at the barricades, and every Mexican soldier who showed himself. They had brought with them two cannon, a twelve and a six pounder, but the first was dismounted, and the second could not be served without a breastwork for the protection of the gunners. The streets were swept by the Mexican fire, so that there could be no communication between the two divisions. The battle lasted in this way all day, the

Texans having one man killed and fifteen wounded, among the latter two colonels and a lieutenant. Deaf Smith and some others were wounded on the top of Veramendi's house, which they endeavored to hold, but from which they were driven by the Mexican fire. In the night the Texans succeeded in opening communication between the two divisions by digging a trench across Soledad street under the enemy's fire, which was kept up during the darkness. The Mexicans spent the night in strengthening their barricades, and in cutting holes for musketry fire through the parapet walls of the houses which commanded the street. During the following day the Texans succeeded in mounting their twelve-pounder, and it was fired a few times without much effect. A party under Lieutenant William McDonald broke into a house adjoining that of Garcia, extending the line of attack toward the plaza. During the night the Mexicans kept up a feeble fire, and dug a trench on the Alamo side of the river for the purpose of opening a cross-fire. On the morning of the third day of the siege the Mexicans opened fire from the trench, but it was soon silenced by the Texan rifles. At noon Henry Karnes dashed forward at the head of a party, and broke down the door of a house still farther toward the plaza. It was occupied and held by Captain York's company. In the evening Colonel Milam was killed. He had crossed the lines to Colonel Johnson's position, and was just entering the courtyard of the Veramendi house, when he was struck in

the head by a musket ball. A consultation of the officers was held, and the chief command was conferred upon Colonel Johnson. The body of Colonel Milam was buried where he fell. At ten o'clock that night the Texans broke into and occupied the house of Antonio Navarro, adjoining the Military Plaza and one block from the Main Plaza, and stormed a redoubt, which had been erected in the same street. The Mexicans attempted to dislodge them from the Navarro house by firing through loopholes made in the roof, but the Texan rifles had a quicker and surer aim, and soon cleared the roof. On the fourth day of the siege the Texans attacked a row of houses adjoining the Navarro house, known as the "Zambrano Row." The houses were of stone with thick partition walls, which the Texans broke down with crowbars, clearing each room as they advanced. The Mexicans resisted stoutly, but were finally driven out, and the Zambrano Row, which extended to one corner of the Main Plaza, was occupied by the Texans. During the day a small party of Mexicans from the Alamo advanced upon General Burleson's camp, but were driven off. In the evening Colonel Ugartechea arrived in town with a nominal reinforcement. It consisted of 500 convict soldiers, who had been marched in chains from the Rio Grande under the guard of 100 regulars. They brought no provisions with them, and their arrival was only an additional weakness. On the last night of the siege the Texans captured a building known as

the "Priest's House," which fronted upon the centre of the Main Plaza, and commanded the interior of the Mexican defenses. At ten o'clock a hundred men, by a quick rush from the Garcia house, gained the entrance to the Priest's House, and, under a heavy fire from an adjoining outbuilding occupied by the Mexicans, broke into and held it. They spent the night in barricading the doors and windows and in cutting loop-holes through the walls, the enemy keeping up a heavy and noisy fire. But the Mexicans did not wait to be exposed to the fire of the Texan rifles in the interior of their works, and withdrew before dawn to the Alamo. It is asserted that General Cos intended to make an attack upon General Burleson's camp from the Alamo, but there was great confusion and some insubordination among the troops. The Alamo was crowded with women and children, who had fled from San Antonio. They were panic-stricken on the arrival of the retreating troops, and there was a commotion in which all order was lost. Some of the troops deserted and fled toward the Rio Grande. In the morning General Cos sent in a flag of truce to General Burleson proposing terms of capitulation.

General Burleson repaired to San Antonio, and the terms were arranged. The articles were creditable to the moderation of the victors. General Cos and his officers were allowed to retain their arms and private property on giving their parole of honor not to oppose the reëstablishment of the Constitution of

1824; the regular soldiers were to be allowed to return to Mexico, or to remain, according to their own choice; the convict soldiers were to be conducted across the Rio Grande under guard; the troops returning to Mexico were to be supplied with provisions to last them on their march as far as the Rio Grande at the ordinary prices; the sick and wounded were to be left to the care of the victors; the public property and arms, of course, came into the possession of the Texans. On the 14th of December, General Cos set out on his retreat with 1105 men, two cannon, and sufficient arms for protection against the Indians and to guard the convicts. •

The Texan loss at the capture of San Antonio was only two killed and twenty-six wounded. The loss of the Mexicans was not reported, and is variously estimated at from 100 to 300. Twenty-one pieces of artillery, a large quantity of small arms and munitions of war fell into the hands of the Texans.

On December 15, General Burleson resigned the command of the army and returned to his home, leaving a force under the command of Colonel Johnson to hold the Alamo. The larger part of the volunteers left the camp for their homes, and the army was practically disbanded. During the siege of San Antonio a slight engagement took place near the town of Lipanítitlan on the Nueces. The garrison at Lipanítitlan under orders from General Cos had marched to attack Goliad, while the garrison of Goliad advanced by another road and captured Lipanítitlan.

Both parties retraced their steps and met on the prairie. The Mexicans were defeated and compelled to surrender. They were released on the condition that they should leave the country, and not bear arms against the Texans. After General Cos's retreating forces had crossed the Rio Grande, there was not an armed Mexican soldier left in the territory of Texas.

Just after the capture of San Antonio a very painful and disgraceful affair occurred at Tampico. General Mexia, a leader of the Liberal party in Mexico, fled from the country, and went to New Orleans. There he concocted a plot to force a party of emigrants to Texas to join in a descent upon Tampico. On November 6, the emigrants, to the number of 130, embarked on the schooner *Mary Jane*, bound, as the greater part of them supposed, to Matagorda. When they had been six days at sea they were informed that the vessel was bound to Tampico, and that they were expected to take part in a revolutionary movement. About fifty, who were probably privy to the plot, consented to enlist. The rest were confined in the hold. In attempting to enter the harbor of Tampico the schooner struck on the bar and was wrecked. The party got ashore in their boats. The officer in command of the fort on the north of the town, who was probably in collusion with Mexia, surrendered it at the first demand. The next day, Sunday, December 15, arms were forced into the hands of those who had previously refused to serve, and an advance was made upon the town. Mexia expected that a party

of the inhabitants would declare in his favor, but they rallied unanimously in defense of the Central Government, with shouts of "Viva Santa Anna!" and "Death to the Foreigners!" A feeble attack on the plaza was repulsed, and Mexia and a portion of the troops escaped on board a small vessel in the harbor, which landed them at the mouth of the Brazos. Thirty-one were taken prisoners. Three died of their wounds, and twenty-eight were shot, in spite of heavy ransoms offered for their release.

The Mexicans had two armed vessels upon the coast, the Bravo and the Montezuma, which caused considerable annoyance to the Texas trade. Early in November, the Bravo pursued and drove ashore near Pass Caballo the schooner Hannah Elizabeth, laden with arms and ammunition for the Texan troops and a private consignment of goods. The Bravo took off the crew and passengers, and left a prize crew on board the stranded Hannah Elizabeth. The Bravo was driven off by a gale, and the citizens of Matagorda manned the schooner William Robbins, which sailed out and recaptured the Hannah Elizabeth. The Mexican vessels disappeared from the coast.